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Netherlands to compensate trans victims of forced sterilisation

Transgender people will get compensation of 5,000 euros each after Dutch apology.

By By Karolin Schaps

Thomson Reuters Foundation (01.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3gtwqbB> - The Dutch government has agreed to pay about 2,000 trans people who had to undergo sterilisation to legally change their gender 5,000 euros (\$5,993) each in compensation.

Until 2014, Dutch trans people who wished to amend the gender on their birth certificate first had to be sterilised and to alter their bodies, through hormones and surgery, to match their new gender.

"Such a violation of physical integrity is no longer imaginable today," said Sander Dekker, Dutch minister for legal protection, in a statement.

"It is important to acknowledge the suffering of transgender people and to offer recognition, compensation and apologies for it."

The Netherlands follows in the footsteps of Sweden, which in 2018 became the first country in the world to compensate victims of a similar sterilisation law.

However, the Dutch compensation package for trans people who changed their registered gender between July 1, 1985 and July 1, 2014 is much lower than Sweden's payment of 225,000 crowns (\$26,411) per person.

A number of European Union countries still require sterilisation in order to legally change gender, including Finland, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria.

"It is quite a u-turn," said Willemijn van Kempen, a trans woman who was one of the initiators of the compensation campaign, which was launched in 2019 by a group of individuals and trans rights groups.

"Apologies and recognition are given after all the forced procedures on our body and the sterilisation resulting in an unfulfilled wish to have children," she said in a statement issued by women's rights law firm Bureau Clara Wichmann.

"I am happy with (the decision), but it still feels unreal and I have to let this sink in for a while."

Nora Uitterlinden, a spokeswoman for Transgender Netwerk Nederland, welcomed the government's apology.

"The wounds this inflicted on so many people and on the community as a whole are deep and enduring," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in emailed comments.

"Both those who ultimately underwent surgery and sterilisation to comply with the law as well as those who did not and consequently had to live without legal recognition of their identity."

MPs want to ban religious schools from refusing LGBTQ+ students

NL Times (17.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3m9vW3R> - Schools must never be allowed to refuse students based on their religion, sexual orientation or ideals, according to a SP motion meant to regulate the acceptance obligations for all schools by law. A large parliamentary majority of VVD, D66, SP, PvdA, GroenLinks, and others, supports this motion, NOS reports.

Discussions affecting religion and education is a sensitive topic in Dutch politics. Last week there was outrage when Education Minister Arie Slob defended Christian schools who had parents sign anti-gay statements before allowing their child. The Minister referred to Article 23, saying that these statements were allowed as long as the school provided a safe education space for all students. He later retracted that statement.

Article 23 states that anyone may establish a school and that public and special education are financially equal. It was first added to the Constitution in 1917. Over the years, multiple parties, including PvdA, D66, GroenLinks, and SP, submitted plans to modernize this article. But the Christian parties in particular are opposed to the amendment of Article 23, according to the broadcaster. Two of the Christian parties, CDA and ChristenUnie, are in the current coalition.

After pleas to update this Article in 2006 and 2018, the PvdA is now submitting a bill for a constitutional amendment. According to the PvdA, Article 23 was intended to let parents choose a school that fits their ideals. But schools are now abusing that to refuse students, party leader Lodewijk Asscher said to NOS. "Because of a language deficiency or because their parents hold the wrong faith," he said. "Minister Slob unintentionally demonstrated perfectly why things really have to be changed."

Such a bill has to get a two-thirds majority in both parliament and the Senate, and changing the Constitution takes a long time. The SP therefore submitted its motion for the interim. SP parliamentarian Jasper van Dijk wants to "put an end to the door policy that special schools can implement," he said to the broadcaster. "It is too crazy for words that a school can refuse a child because they are not Christian. I'd prefer to see all children go to school together."

The VVD and D66 supporting the motion will likely cause strife in the coalition, as the Rutte III coalition agreement stated that the freedom of education and Article 23 will be left untouched in this government term.

D66 parliamentarian Paul van Meenen thinks that the SP motion was drawn up in such a way that "the pain in the coalition will not immediately drive the four parties apart," he said to NOS. The topic is indeed sensitive in the coalition, he said. "But the motion is not calling the government to do anything, a 'speak out' wording has been chosen. That is a start and can help a little bit."

Firework bombings targeted Amsterdam home flying an LGBT flag

By Janene Pieters

NL Times (14.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/32BfrXb> - A home in Amsterdam Oost twice had fireworks bombs explode in front of it over the weekend. Resident Jesper Raaijman believes that his home is being targeted because of the rainbow flag hanging from his balcony, he said to Het Parool.

"I was sitting on my couch with my curtains open a little when I heard something fall on my balcony and someone running away," the 35-year-old man said to the newspaper. "I went to see what was going on, and then saw a red flash. I realized I had to get away because the glass may shatter. That didn't happen, but my flower box was blown up."

That was around 8:45 p.m. on Saturday. On Sunday at 8:15 p.m., another fireworks bomb exploded in front of Raaijman's home, then on the ground floor.

Raaijman is shaken. "I just hope it stays at that," he said to the newspaper. He is also worried about the children who play in the area. They could get hurt if there are more attacks.

He, with the rest of the Oostpoort neighborhood, hung rainbow flags to show solidarity with a gay couple in the area, whose rainbow flag was pelted with eggs in two incidents at the end of July. On August 19th, Raaijman's home was also targeted. A friend looking after his house opened the balcony doors and had rotten eggs thrown at her.

"More attention needs to be paid to this. I think that this must not be possible for Amsterdam standards, that this happens that apparently you cannot have a rainbow flag hanging on your balcony," he said to the newspaper.

A spokesperson for the Amsterdam police confirmed the two fireworks bomb incidents to Het Parool, and that Raaijman pressed charges. The police's team focused on anti-LGBTQ incidents is investigating.

Dutch gov't uncovers holiday camps for 'conversion therapy'

15 organisations and individuals offer so-called "conversion therapy" in the Netherlands, aiming to make gay people straight.

By Karolin Schaps

Thomson Reuters Foundation (11.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2UX3hU1> - In the Netherlands, 15 organisations and individuals offer so-called "conversion therapy" aiming to make gay

people straight, the health ministry said, as it mulls a ban on the discredited practice which can cause severe mental health problems.

The treatments sometime take place in holiday camps and workshops, the ministry said in a study commissioned after several lawmakers called for conversion therapy to be outlawed as it was putting vulnerable youngsters at risk.

"Within a religious context, there are various initiatives, agencies and individuals which have emerged in this research that - in neutral terms - attempt to help people with a non-heterosexual orientation," it said.

"There are fifteen organisations or individuals who may also organise peripheral activities (e.g. holiday camps, seminars and workshops) in which a non-heterosexual orientation is regarded as problematic and attempts are made to 'remedy' this."

A top United Nations expert this month called for a global ban on conversion therapy, which can range from counselling and 'praying away the gay' to electric shocks and sexual violence, describing it as cruel, inhumane and degrading.

A growing number of countries - including the United States, Canada, Chile and Mexico - are reviewing their laws. Brazil, Ecuador and Malta have nationwide bans on conversion therapy while Germany outlawed the treatment for minors last month.

The Dutch health ministry said it will publish a second study in the next few months recommending what action to take.

"These practices have harmful consequences for victims and for this reason it is bad that they are being carried out," a health ministry spokesman told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The study included an online questionnaire, which 239 LGBT+ people responded to. About 30% said they had experienced conversion therapy.

"(These individuals) are most likely the tip of the iceberg," the study said, adding that more than half of respondents said their therapies had lasted more than one year.

Nearly all of the people who underwent conversion therapy reported suffering from psychological problems, including depression, suicidal thoughts and eating disorders, sexual issues and loneliness.

"It is now up to politicians to immediately ban these practices," the Dutch LGBT+ rights group COC Netherlands said in a statement.